

Statement  
By  
Ms. Carolyn Hannan  
Director, Division for the Advancement of Women  
at the  
Ninth Session of the  
Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean  
Mexico City  
10 – 12 June 2004

Your Excellency, Madame Martha Sahgun de Fox  
Honourable Ministers  
Executive Secretary, Mr. José Luis Machinea  
Distinguished Representatives of the Host Country  
Distinguished Delegates and Participants

I am greatly honoured to address this Ninth Session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean. I would like to thank the Government of the United Mexican States for hosting this Conference and for the warm hospitality extended to participants. I wish to also commend the Government for the continued strong commitment to gender equality as evidenced by the official opening of this Conference, and the reinforcement of the international commitments, by President Vicente Fox, as well as by the participation of Madame Martha Sahgun de Fox. I would like to congratulate the organizers of the Conference, including the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), particularly Ms. Sonia Montaña, Chief of the Women and Development Unit, on the excellent organization of this important event.

It is a privilege to be in Mexico to celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the First United Nations World Conference on Women held in Mexico City in 1975. For anyone with a sense of history, it is inspiring to recall that in these very halls, 30 years ago, world leaders gathered to strengthen the agenda for the advancement of women and gender, and to take critical decisions that have, in many different ways, affected all our lives. The former President of Mexico, His Excellency Luis Echeverria Alvarez, personally chaired many of the important plenary sessions at the Conference. Ms. Helvi Sipila from Finland, the Secretary-General of the Conference, provided the inspiration and guidance required to ensure a successful outcome. I wish to pay tribute to their efforts and the efforts of many other women and men it is not possible to name here. I am certain that the spirit of hope and commitment of that Conference will be with us in the coming three days.

The Conference in 1975, and the United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985) proclaimed by the General Assembly five months later, at the urging of the Conference, set the stage for a new era in global efforts to promote the advancement of women by launching a worldwide dialogue and establishing concrete global commitments on the empowerment of women and gender equality. The overall vision of “equality – development – peace”, established at the Conference, continues to guide us today. A critical process was set in motion – involving a continuous cycle of research and analysis; goal-setting; reviewing progress to identify achievements as well as gaps, challenges and obstacles; and renewing and expanding commitments. The World Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Objectives of International Women’s Year 1975, adopted by the Mexico Conference, was the first comprehensive global programme for the advancement and empowerment of women. It is indeed important to commemorate this pathbreaking event.

The Conference gathered an impressive group of women leaders – government representatives, professionals, activist and academics. Women leaders in civil society played a key role in the parallel NGO forum, which set the stage for increased future involvement of civil society in all aspects of the United Nations work. These women

leaders continued to make invaluable contributions to the promotion of women's empowerment and gender equality at national, regional and global levels, and became a strong force for change around the world.

The women leaders gathered here in 1975 included many Latin American and Caribbean women, who have made important contributions to the advancement and empowerment of women. I wish to acknowledge Ms. Carmen Barosso, well-known Brazilian activist in this region who was active in the NGO forum. I would like to - through her - to pay tribute to the efforts of women's groups and networks in this region to keep the issue of women's empowerment and gender equality firmly on the political agendas at national, regional and global level.

I would also like to acknowledge Ms. Aida Gonzalez Martinez who was the head of the organizing committee for the Conference in the Mexican Government. Ms. Gonzalez continues to be extremely active in support of the advancement of women and gender equality in her own country as well as regionally and globally, particularly as a distinguished expert on the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Another Mexican women leader who made an important contribution to the work of the United Nations in follow-up to the world conference is Ms. Maria del Rosario Green Macías, the former Foreign Minister of Mexico. Appointed the Senior Adviser of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995, she was an outspoken advocate on a wide variety of women's issues, including working conditions in the United Nations and the involvement of women in United Nations programmes world-wide.

Finally, I would also like to take the opportunity to acknowledge another woman leader from this region, Ms. Angela King from Jamaica, who has played a key role in the work of the United Nations on gender equality. Ms. King was part of the Secretariat for the Conference in 1975. She was appointed Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Equality and the Advancement of Women in 1997 and made a major contribution

to the global promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women. Ms. King recently retired after 37 years of service in the United Nations.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates and participants,

The objectives of the three themes established at the First World Conference on Women – Gender Equality – Development – Peace, were, broadly speaking, to eliminate discrimination of women and girls and promote equality between women and men; to ensure the integration of the concerns and priorities of women as well as men in all areas of development, and thus increase the effectiveness and sustainability of development efforts; and to increase the contribution of women to the strengthening of peace, and ensure specific attention to their needs and priorities, in conflict and post-conflict situations. These objectives still stand today and the importance of the integral links between equality, development and peace is increasingly highlighted.

Minimum targets were set in Mexico. These included equal access for women to every level of education and training; enactment of legislation guaranteeing the political participation of women; increased employment of women; and improvement in health services, sanitation, housing, nutrition and family planning. Each country was expected to identify its own targets and priorities and develop national strategies. The minimum targets discussed at the Conference can be seen as important predecessors of the innovative work on indicators on the advancement of women carried out in this region, under the guidance of ECLAC. The need to establish concrete targets and indicators at national level remains critical today.

One of the important demands of the Mexico Conference was for the United Nations to accelerate work on the elaboration of a binding treaty on the elimination of discrimination against women. This treaty, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, was adopted in 1979 and entered into force two years later in 1981, faster than any other human rights treaty had entered into force. Today, the Convention is signed by 177 Member States and its Optional Protocol has

been adopted by 60 States parties. The 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of CEDAW by the General Assembly on 18 December 1979 will be celebrated this year. A strong future focus should be on ensuring full implementation of the Convention at national level, including by highlighting the importance of the concluding comments of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.

Perhaps one of the most significant processes that evolved from the First World Conference in Mexico was the development of strong and vibrant networks of civil society groups, at national, regional and global levels. Over the past 30 years civil society organizations, in particular women's groups and networks, have increased in strength and effectiveness and have played a very strategic role in moving the global agenda on gender equality forward. Non-governmental organizations have energized the debates on critical areas and contributed to increasing the visibility of, and recognition of, the importance of gender equality for development. A great deal of the sustained attention and the achievements made over the past decades has been due to their efforts. Their role in advocating for and monitoring implementation of the commitment made by Governments has been particularly significant.

The increasing partnerships between Governments and civil society on the promotion of women's empowerment and gender equality is an extremely positive development, which is creating new and important synergies and facilitating the active involvement of a broad range of stakeholders.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates and participants,

Twenty years after Mexico – and following on the gains made in the Second and Third World Conferences on Women in Copenhagen (1980) and Nairobi (1985) and the International Conference on Population and Development (1994) – the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, and the outcome of its review in the General Assembly in New York in 2000, moved the global agenda for the advancement of women forward significantly. 189 countries unanimously adopted the Beijing

Declaration and the Platform for Action, which identified 12 critical areas for action. Designed as an agenda for women's empowerment, the emphasis of the Platform for Action is on the integration of women as full and equal partners in decision-making processes, and increased attention to their concerns and priorities in all areas of development. The responsibilities of Governments and all other actors and stakeholders were clearly outlined.

With the adoption of the Platform for Action, Governments committed themselves to the effective mainstreaming of gender perspectives throughout all policy development and planning processes. They undertook to consider issues from both women's and men's perspectives before decisions were made and resources allocated. Gender mainstreaming remains an important global strategy for women's empowerment and gender equality, alongside activities targeted to address specific gaps and inequalities. While many achievements have been made on gender mainstreaming, both by Member States and by the United Nations system, serious gaps and challenges remain which need to be explicitly identified and addressed. A major challenge is to ensure that gender analysis is the basis for policy development and decision-making in all areas, and that actors at all levels, women as well as men, have the awareness, commitment and capacity required to identify and address gender issues in their work. Strengthened accountability mechanisms, to ensure implementation of the many excellent policies and strategies already in place at national level, are also required. National mechanisms for the advancement of women have important catalytic roles to play, advocating, supporting and monitoring the attention to gender perspectives in the work of line ministries and other critical bodies at national level.

In 2000, Member States of the United Nations adopted the Millennium Declaration to galvanize global support for the full implementation of the development agenda established in the global conferences and summits of the 1990s. The Millennium Declaration explicitly outlined that gender equality and the empowerment of women is an essential precondition for the eradication of poverty and hunger and the achievement of sustainable development. One Millennium Development Goal is specifically focused on

gender equality and women's empowerment, but gender perspectives must be explicitly identified and addressed in relation to all the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Efforts are underway to expand the targets and indicators to more adequately reflect the broad range of gaps and challenges facing the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women today.

The overall global framework for gender equality and empowerment of women remains the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action from 1995 and the emerging issues identified in the review and appraisal in 2000 (Beijing +5). The framework of the Millennium Development Goals does not replace this global framework but should be seen as an instrument to support its full implementation. It needs to be kept in mind that, despite significant efforts, few measureable targets were established in the Platform for Action and the outcome of the review and appraisal in 2000. Working in the context of the Millennium Development Goals, with globally endorsed targets and indicators, does, therefore, represent an important opportunity for increasing the focus on national level implementation and measuring progress and outcomes.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates and participants,

Many achievements have been made in relation to women's empowerment and gender equality over the past decades and these should certainly be celebrated here today. There have, for example, been significant advances for women in many parts of the world in relation to health, education and employment. However, the fact that, 30 years after the First World Conference on Women, many of the goals set have not yet been achieved is to be lamented. The persistent, and in some cases increasing, incidence of violence against women, the under-representation of women in decision-making in all areas and at all levels, the lack of access of many women to basic reproductive health services, and the fact that women are disproportionately affected by poverty, is unacceptable. In addition, over the past decades, new challenges for women's empowerment and gender equality have emerged which need to be addressed, for example in relation to HIV/AIDS, globalization, trafficking and ICT.

The understanding of the structural causes for the persistence of the discrimination that women and girls face has increased greatly since 1975. New approaches are needed to directly address these causes, rather than focus solely on the symptoms and consequences of inequalities as they are reflected in the lives of women and girls. In the new millennium a key focus should also be the strengths and contributions of women. While in no way downplaying the real risks and vulnerabilities that women and girls face in many contexts – for example in conflict and post-conflict situations, the enormous potential of women and girls, and the development costs of continued discrimination and neglect of their human rights, should be further highlighted. The fact that there can be no real development without the full participation and contribution of women as well as men should be a driving force in future efforts.

A further important challenge is to promote increased engagement and active involvement of men and boys, in partnership with women. Women's empowerment and gender equality should not be marginalized as a "women's issue", but addressed as a critical societal issue of concern to both women and men. Over the past decade steps have been taken in this direction, as evidenced most recently with the adoption by the Commission on the Status of Women at its 48<sup>th</sup> session in March 2004, of agreed conclusion on the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates and participants,

The ten-year review and appraisal of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (Beijing+5) will be undertaken in the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-ninth session in 2005. The challenge is to facilitate the development of new and more effective ways of translating the commitments made by Governments, the United Nations system and other international and regional organizations, and civil society, into effective action programmes to ensure full implementation at national level.



The Conference here in Mexico provides an important opportunity to begin reflecting on the potentials and challenges in implementation of the Platform for Action at national level, that need to be addressed in the global review and appraisal next year. It is heartening that so many representatives of Governments and civil society organizations in Latin American and Caribbean countries have gathered here to share experiences on achievements, gaps and challenges, as well as further actions required to ensure full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action at national and regional levels.

Non-governmental organizations and civil society groups and networks have made major contributions to reviews of progress in women's empowerment and gender equality over the past 30 years, and continue to do so today, as evidenced by the NGO Forum held earlier this week. Significant participation and contributions from women's groups and networks is also anticipated in the forthcoming global review and appraisal in 2005 in New York.

I would like to say one final word of congratulations and thanks to ECLAC. In the follow-up to the world conferences on women, the regional commissions have played a critical role supporting the efforts of Member States and organizing dynamic and effective review processes. ECLAC has always been a leader in this respect, as evidenced by this conference.

The whole United Nations stands ready to support Governments, civil society and other stakeholders in this region in their efforts to ensure the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at national level.

I wish you every success in your discussions and I am confident that on 13 June, you will be able to close this Conference with a sense of satisfaction at having, in this very historic setting, taken another important step forward towards our common goal – the realization of the empowerment of women and equality between women and men.

Thank you.